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ABSTRACT

As leisure services facilities have expanded with the growth in numbers of older adults, there has been a corresponding need for personnel trained in recreational work with the aged. From survey responses regarding roles and related functions, competencies for these recreational workers were prioritized and subsequently used as the basis for developing an in-service training program for entry level personnel providing leisure services to non-institutionalized older adults. (Although geographically specific, the training program outline and components are adaptable for use by counselors and recreation directors.) (Author/BMW)

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COMPETENCY-BASED IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN RECREATION FOR THE AGED

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

This study was concerned with the development of a competency-based in-service training program for entry-level personnel providing leisure services to non-institutionalized persons age sixty-five and over in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. The training program is designed to be a guide for in-service trainers attempting to help entry-level staff improve their leadership and programming skills in performing recreation work with the aged.

Significance of the Study

The proportion of persons age sixty-five and over in our nation has grown tremendously since the turn of the century, and is projected to continue to grow (Administration on Aging, 1979). Numerous articles and studies (DeCarlo, 1972; Frekany and Leslie, 1974; Ginsburg, 1974; and Ray, 1975) have demonstrated the importance of leisure services to the aged. Because leisure services appear to be important to the aged, and the aged population continues to grow, it is important that programs in the area of leisure services expand along with other services for the aged.

In fact, the number of senior centers in the U.S. has grown from 1,200 in 1970 (Administration on Aging, 1970) to nearly 5,000 in 1974 (National Council on Aging, 1974). As the number of leisure programs for the aged grow, the need for personnel trained to perform recreation work with older persons will also grow. The in-service training program

developed as a result of this project can be used by in-service trainers to facilitate an increase in the number of recreation personnel trained to work with the aged.

Definitions

The term aged is used in this study to denote persons age sixty-five and over. This definition is used because age sixty-five is a commonly identified minimum age requirement for participation in leisure programs for older persons. Leisure service for the aged is defined in this study as free-time activity opportunities provided to the aged which emanate from either a senior center (public or private) or a municipal department of recreation for the aged. For the purposes of this paper, entry-level leisure service personnel are defined as those workers involved in direct leadership work (face-to-face contact) with the aged. The greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area is defined as the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1973).

Competency-based instruction is defined as an approach to education which stresses accountability and personalization of learning experiences. In competency-based instruction, learning objectives are stated in behavioral terms and are made know to the student at the start of the program (Houston, 1974). Delbecq, et al. (1975) describe the Nominal Group Technique as a research method used to solve problems which utilizes silent generation of ideas, face-to-face discussion, and anonymousvvoting among a panel of experts.

PROCEDURES

The first step in the study was to gather background information on the major roles and functions of recreation leaders for the aged in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. This was accomplished through contacts with role incumbents and a review of the literature. A Nominal Group Technique meeting with five experts in the area of leisure services for the aged was then conducted for the purpose of further delineating the major roles of recreation leaders for the aged. As a result of the Nominal Group Technique meeting, a forty-eight item list of roles and related functions and competencies of recreation leaders for the aged was generated. The most highly rated role statement in this list was "identify and consider the needs of the aging population." These forty-eight items were consolidated by the researcher into an eleven item list of highly rated roles of recreation leaders. The panel members then chose the seven most important items from this list through a follow-up voting procedure. The seven most highly rated role statements then served as a guide to the researcher in attempting to identify skills needed in order to perform entry-level recreation work with the aged.

Competencies needed to perform the major roles were identified through a review of literature, and contacts with role incumbents and experts in the field (including the Nominal Group Technique panel members). As a result of this process, thirty-five competency items

were identified. A survey was then developed and piloted for the purpose of obtaining a rating of the importance of these thirty-five items. The survey was administered to forty-two role incumbents in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. These forty-two subjects were mostly workers in publically-run District of Columbia senior centers.

RESULTS

From the results of the survey (66.67 percent response rate), twenty-one competencies were determined to be most important in performing recreation leadership work for the aged. A priority listing of the twenty-one most highly rated competencies (mean score of three or above) appears in Table 1. All of these twenty-one items appear in the training program. The six most highly rated items (mean scores of 3.39 or higher) were: "understanding the effects of common physical limitations due to aging;" "awareness of the need for recognition, achievement, and intellectual stimulation among older adults;" "ability to inspire participant interest in recreation activities;" "awareness that the older adult should be a part of the program planning process;" "demonstrate the ability to communicate accurately, effectively, and concisely, both orally, and in writing, to participants and staff;" and "plan, construct, and maintain activity groups." These six items received the greatest emphasis in the training program.

The training program contains two modules (sections), "Recreation Leadership and Group Work with the Aged," and "Program Planning and Evaluation." Each module contains all of the following: brief statement of purpose, or significance of the module; a listing of behavioral objectives and sub-objectives (competencies needed in order to perform recreation work for the aged); a listing of learning activities, or tasks, designed to test the acquisition of the competencies listed in the previous section; a brief guide on how to answer the learning tasks; a guide to behavioral assessment of the in-service trainee; and a listing of references to facilitate competency acquisition.

The training program was reviewed by five experts in the areas of recreation for the aged and competency-based recreation education. Program reviewers' suggestions for improvement of the training program were implemented by the researcher. The reviewers unanimously agreed that the training program dealt with an important subject area and can be useful in facilitating in-service training.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM

The entire training program is not presented in this section of the paper because of the program's length (28 pages). However, an excerpt of the program is presented in order to give the reader a better understanding of the format and content of the program.

One of the competency areas identified in the training program

is "effectively motivate older adults to participate in recreational activities." The following is a breakdown of this competency area into individual competency items (all of which received a rating of three or above in the survey of greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area workers):

1. Awareness and understanding of various techniques of motivating older adults to participate in recreation.
2. Provide individual and group guidance with respect to participant use of leisure time.
3. Ability to foster a positive self-image within the older adult.
4. Construct a program setting which motivates participants and staff (proper lighting, music, and decor).

Learning tasks were identified in order to help assess proficiency in the afore-mentioned competencies. (The tasks are numbered to correspond to the competency items listed in the previous paragraph.)

1. Briefly describe one technique that can be used to motivate an older adult to participate in recreational activity.
2. Mr. X states that he is bored and that there is nothing to do at the center. Describe one approach to this situation.
3. Mr. Brown, in excellent health, loves to watch sports, but avoids participation in sports activities. He states that although he likes sports, he doesn't want to "make a fool of himself." Describe one way of getting Mr. Brown involved in sports activities.

4. Briefly describe an "ideal" program setting, considering lighting, music, furniture, and decor.

The following is a guide to answering these learning tasks:

1. Assess the person's needs, interests, and abilities, and attempt to uncover the person's underlying attitudes toward recreation participation. Then try to program activities for the person which best suit his particular interests. As an example, suppose a participant maintains a strong belief in the work ethic and views leisure activity in a negative light. If this is the case, try to plan activities for that person which have a work component and thus would be more acceptable for the person to engage in.
2. An approach to this situation should include an assessment of Mr. X's interests, and referral to appropriate activities suited to his needs and abilities.
3. One approach is to break down an activity into simpler sub-tasks and have the participant attempt to master these easier tasks. The purpose of this is to attempt to bolster the participant's self-image and give him confidence and motivation needed in order to attempt the activity.
4. In constructing an "ideal" program setting, common physical limitations of older persons, as well as participant needs and interests should be considered (e.g. bright lighting is desirable in the reading room to assist those with poor vision, and background

music should be soft and relaxing for the participants.

The following is a guide to behavioral assessment of the trainee:

Assess participant interest in leisure activities through the use of a leisure interest inventory. Have the trainee examine the results of the inventory for five participants, and instruct the trainee to work with those five persons in order to help increase their motivation to participate in leisure activities. Effective motivational skills would be demonstrated by a significant increase in leisure activity participation by four of the five participants following two weeks of motivational work with the five participants. Also observe verbal and non-verbal feedback from the participants during activity participation. Survey the participants in order to discover if the participants desire to participate in additional activities, and/or increase their participation levels in activities they are already engaged in.

Program Implementation

The training program is designed to be implemented during normal working days for a senior center. The in-service trainer(s) should observe staff in action (leading activities) in order to assess their pre-training competency strengths and weaknesses. Training should then be individualized in order to emphasize each trainee's particular strengths and weaknesses.

In attempting to facilitate competency acquisition, the trainer(s) should employ a combination of practical demonstration of leadership

skills with program participants, and lecture and discussion sessions with staff at the end of the day (after participants have left the center).

After a time lapse of three to four weeks, the trainer(s) should make follow-up visit(s) to the center. Post-training assessments should be made of competency strengths and weaknesses. Practical demonstration and lecture and discussion sessions should again emphasize the particular competency needs of the workers.

It should be emphasized that while in-service trainers should focus their efforts on training workers in areas they are deficient in, positive reinforcement should also be given to workers for skills in which they are proficient. Even if a worker appears to be very strong in a particular skill, positive reinforcement can sometimes make the worker even more proficient in that skill.

The trainers should also select literature (from the listing of references in the training program) for each worker to read, based on each worker's particular competency needs. Written assignments may be given to staff. These can be reviewed at the follow-up visit(s). Some of the competency items in the program are perhaps best assessed through written and/or oral means, rather than direct observation of worker performance. An example of such a competency item is "awareness of public and private sources of funding." Assessment of proficiency in this competency could be achieved by simply asking the trainee to list and briefly describe some of the major sources of funding for recreation

programs for the aged.

In summary, implementation of the training program should emphasize individualization of learning experiences. Observation of staff in action should be emphasized in assessing trainee proficiency in the various competencies. In addition, practical demonstration of recreation leadership and programming skills (with the program participants) should be the primary means of facilitating skill acquisition by the trainees.

DISCUSSION

There was some discrepancy among the opinions of the survey subjects, and those of experts in the field (expressed in the literature, by the Nominal Group Technique panel members, and the five program reviewers) regarding the roles, functions, and competencies of recreation leaders for the aged. Some of the competency items identified in the literature, and by experts in the field, but not specified by the survey subjects included: public relations skills; an understanding of the sociological and psychological aspects of aging; assistance in daily activities, such as lunch and transportation; awareness and understanding of program goals and objectives; plan and develop daily activities schedules; use of touch, and other non-verbal communication techniques to motivate older persons; evaluation

of program participants' progress; ability to perform simple first-aid and health procedures; understanding of biological aspects of aging; and an awareness of the various myths and stereotypes of aging. Although many of these competency items (particularly understanding of the sociological and psychological aspects of aging) were greatly emphasized as having great importance by experts in the field, these items were omitted from the training program. The importance of the competency items not included in the training program is recognized. However, the only items included in the training program were those identified as being important by the survey subjects.

It is recognized that potentially influential variables such as characteristics of the subjects' participant population, philosophy, goals, and physical characteristics of the subjects' center, staffing and size of the subjects' center, and personality characteristics of the subjects might have influenced the survey results. Therefore, in order to increase the usefulness of this program for in-service trainers in other areas of the country, further study should be done on the identification of competencies needed to perform recreation leadership work with the aged. Such research should involve workers in other areas of the country; part-time and volunteer workers, as well as full-time paid employees; and most importantly, older persons themselves. Furthermore, pilot implementation and evaluation of the training program should be conducted as a prerequisite to dissemination

and widespread utilization of the program.

The training program has several unique strengths. One asset of the program is that it focuses on training workers in skills which workers themselves have identified as being most important in performing recreation leadership work with the aged. Another strength of the training program is that it is designed to be implemented so as to cause minimal disruption to a senior center's normal daily operation. Program participants can attend the center as normal during implementation of the training program.

Yet another strength of the training program is its flexible, individualized approach to learning. Certainly, one would expect personnel at senior centers to have different competency strengths and weaknesses. The training approach outlined in this paper places great emphasis on focusing training for each trainee on his/her particular competency strengths and weaknesses.

To summarize, the training program described in this paper can help make a significant contribution towards training entry-level recreation personnel in skills needed when working with the aged. Leisure services to the aged can greatly benefit from increased staff competency; an improvement in leisure programs for the aged is a vital step in attempting to improve the lives of our nation's much neglected aged population.

Table 1

Priority Listing of Highly-Rated Survey Items

*	Item #	Competency Item	Mean Score
P	3	Understanding the effects of common physical limitations due to aging (arthritis, hearing loss, etc.) on program participation.	3.54
P	8	Awareness of the need for recognition, achievement, and intellectual stimulation among older adults.	3.50
L	9	Ability to inspire participant interest in recreation activities.	3.50
P	7	Awareness that the older adult should be a part of the program planning process.	3.46
LP	20	Demonstrate the ability to communicate accurately, effectively, and concisely, both orally and in writting, to participants and staff.	3.43
L	21	Plan, construct, and maintain activity groups.	3.39
P	31	Interpret and apply professional literature and research.	3.29
L	17	Provide leadership and subject matter training for volunteer staff.	3.25
L	28	Provide leadership roles for the program participants.	3.25
L	10	Ability to foster a positive self-image within the older adult.	3.21
L	23	Provide the opportunity for social development among the program participants.	3.21
L	25	Construct a program setting which motivates participants and staff (proper lighting, music, and decor).	3.21

Table 1 (continued)

*	Item #	Competency Item	Mean Score
P	2	Awareness of special architectural considerations needed for the aged so as to avoid physical harm and maximize mobility.	3.18
L	27	Ability to perform effectively in leading individuals in various activities (e.g., parties, discussion groups, games).	3.18
L	29	Train older adults to lead other older adults.	3.18
P	33	Awareness of public and private sources of funding.	3.18
P	18	Solicit contributory services from appropriate personnel and agencies (awareness of community resources).	3.14
L	22	Provide programs of physical fitness and health.	3.14
L	26	Ability to perform effectively in teaching individuals in activity skills (e.g., music, sports, dance, arts and crafts).	
P	32	Awareness of federal programs/regulations regarding programs for the aged.	3.11
P	30	Participate in and attend staff meetings and staff committees.	3.07
P	4	Awareness of special needs and interests of various ethnic groups.	3.00
P	24	Provide individual and group guidance with respect to participant use of leisure time.	3.00

*This column indicates whether an item was included in the program planning module (P), recreation leadership and group work module (L), or both modules (LP).

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